HANDBOOK

for the Identification of Heritage Sites and Features

Yukon
Tourism and Culture

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This publication arises out of a workshop on heritage resource management and Yukon forestry, held Whitehorse in 2004. Workshop participants included the Government of Yukon Heritage Resources and Forestry personnel and Yukon First Nations heritage representatives.

The list of heritage features described in this handbook is not exhaustive but does provide a good representation of what might be encountered in Yukon's forests. Additions, comments and corrections by users of the handbook are welcome.

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Yukon history is preserved in the cabins, camps, trails and material remains left behind by past people. A distinction is made between historical and archaeological sites in the management of these resources. Historical sites generally date to the time of written history (in the Yukon, the past 100 to 150 years) and typically contain examples of built heritage — structures such as cabins, caches and graves. Archaeological sites are older and usually found buried in the ground. While a buried historic occupation may be present, most archaeological sites in the Yukon are characterized by stone tools and chips, animal bone fragments, and the remains of ancient hearths or campfires.

Archaeological sites in the Yukon contain some of the earliest evidence of human occupation in the New World. These sites preserve the history of the original people of the Yukon, and witness the arrival of fur traders and prospectors in the past 150 years. There are more than 3,000 known archaeological sites in the Yukon, spanning the time period from the last Ice Age to the construction of Alaska Highway. Archaeological sites may consist of simple scatters of stone chips, ancient hearths, gold rush artifacts or a World War II aircraft wreck.

Historic structures such as cabins, caches and brush camps are fragile and can be damaged by even small disturbances. Archaeological sites are extremely vulnerable. The thin soils which are typical of the Yukon environment may contain up to 10,000 years of history compacted into only the upper 20 to 30 cm of ground. **Any activity which disturbs the ground can destroy an archaeological site.**

Archaeological and historical sites are protected from disturbance under the *Yukon Historic Resources Act* (Archaeological Site Regulations).

No artifacts may be removed from an archaeological or historic site without a permit.

According to the Yukon Archaeological Sites Regulations, an artifact is an object of archaeological or historical interest that is older than 45 years and has been abandoned.

Historic artifacts associated with a collapsed cache.

- A change in vegetation, such as a grassy clearing or a patch of alder or cottonwood in the midst of a spruce or pine forest, is a clue that there might have been a camp at that location. People usually kept their habitation sites free of brush.
- Habitation sites are generally on well-drained, elevated ground, not too far from water or other wetlands. Very ancient sites may be associated with former water courses such as meltwater channels or may occur on old river terraces high above the present river levels.
- Stream confluences, lake narrows and lake outlets/inlets are particularly sensitive areas.
- High terraces, ridges or hills were favoured game lookouts and also were traditionally preferred for burial sites.
- Winter sites, particularly those relating to trapping, are scattered and may not be associated with water or elevated ground. Look for cut stumps (winter cut), blazed trees and scattered artifacts.
- Limbed trees and axe-cut stumps are a sign that people were camping in an area.

Prehistoric sites

SITE TYPE	FEATURES
Habitation	housepit cave, rock shelter other
Trail	visible bent trees trail markers
Campsite	fire-cracked rock calcined bone lithics (stone axe, artificial cobble concentration) culturally modified trees (stone axe-cut stump, old bark stripping, etc.)
Burial	ground c' _pression mound cremation
Cache	ground cache (depression) boulder cache
Subsistence	caribou fence (wood/stone) rock hunting blind fish trap net sinker stones
Other	

Historic sites

SITE TYPE	FEATURES
Structure	○ brush camp ○ tent frame ○ log building
Structural traces	○ building outline or berm ○ building foundation (log-based, stone-based, concrete-based) ○ depression, rectangular ○ depression, other
Cultural material	○ tin cans ○ bottles ○ axe-cut stumps, culturally modified trees (bark stripping, ringed)
Burial	○ grave house ○ grave fence ○ cross ○ unmarked or ground disturbance, depression
Subsistence feature	○ deadfall trap ○ hunting blind (brush or tree construction) ○ fish wheel ○ fish net ○ net sinker stones ○ traps (leg hold and "houses") ○ snares
Mining	○ placer workings ○ "glory holes" ○ mine adits ○ other (specify)
Travel	○ trail ○ blazed trees ○ wagon road ○ watercraft
Other	○ specify

The following information should be recorded for heritage sites or features encountered in the field.

- Global Positioning System (GPS) location: latitude and longitude or UTM coordinates and NAD (27 or 83).
- Current date and time.
- Estimate of site and feature extent: estimated size of the camp or scatter of cultural remains.
- Brief description of setting and access to assist in locating the site (e.g., on a small rise on the north side of marsh; abandoned river terrace, access via logging road at km xx RHS, Campbell Highway).

Recording a collapsed and overgrown cabin. Corner of cabin just visible by researcher's knee.

- Brief description of site and features (eg., cabin with collapsed cache and artifact scatter).
- Photograph, if possible. Be sure to record frame or photo numbers for the site or feature.

Heritage features above treeline. Remains of a hunting blind.

Historic artifacts associated with a historic dwelling depression.

If heritage sites or features are discovered, please report to:

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or contact the local First Nations' Lands or Heritage offices. (Listing on page 57.)

Collapsed four-post cache with household goods.

Cabins built by trappers and prospectors are found throughout Yukon forests. These are usually small buildings, constructed of logs with sod roofs.

Basal logs of a very old cabin.

More difficult to detect are former cabin locations. Thrifty Yukoners often recycled their logs. All that then remains are basal logs, generally rotted in place, and a slightly bermed rectangular outline where dirt was mounded up around the base of the cabin.

Vegetation growth is more lush inside a cabin outline due to higher organic content. A depression inside the outline indicates a root cellar.

Trees growing inside the root cellar, within the outline of a former cabin.

Canvas tents came into the Yukon with the Klondike gold rush and quickly became a mainstay of First Nations trappers throughout the territory, replacing moose skin tents and brush camps.

Generally one to two basal logs were used to hold down the edges of a canvas wall tent.

The traditional brush camp was a lean-to made with spruce branches or small spruce trees covering a pole tripod framework. Often, temporary brush camps were built by piling up small spruce trees and boughs around the base of a large spruce tree. The tree was always spruce because it is always dry underneath spruce trees.

The size of the brush camp varied depending on people's needs; the average family would construct a shelter approximately 5.5 to 6 feet in height, and 6 by 6 feet at the base. In the upper portion, cross-branches were set to make a kind of storage area. The floor of the brush camp was covered with spruce boughs.

In a camp made up of several families, related people would usually construct their brush camps facing each other, about 1 to 2 feet apart, and would share a common fire placed between the two camps (Legros, 1981:798). In winter, the brush shelter could be covered with mooseskin or moss. Sometimes, for added insulation, snow was piled up along the sides and water thrown over it to form ice.

Hide-tanning pole

Tent poles

Crib for sawing logs

Sled

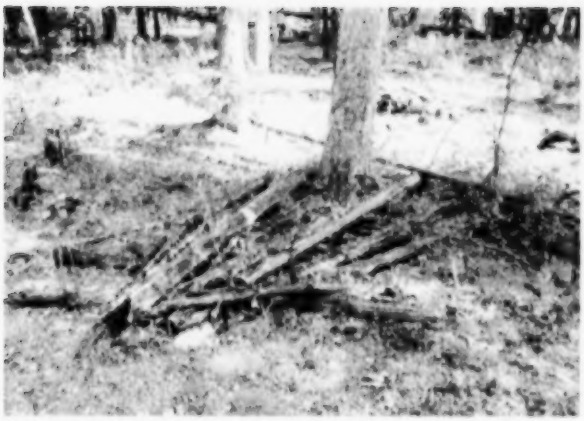
Stage caches

Stage caches consist of a platform between two trees or a group of trees, generally at a height of between five and eight metres. The food stores were placed on the platform and were protected by a skin, and then covered with numerous logs. The cache was accessed by means of a notched log ladder.

Metal cans ring the upright posts to discourage wolverines climbing up to the cache.

Collapsed stage caches

Collapsed stage cache and notched log ladder (arrow).



Collapsed four-post cache

Four-post caches were log platforms constructed on four cut and notched trees or upright posts. These were used to store household goods and were not as high as stage caches.

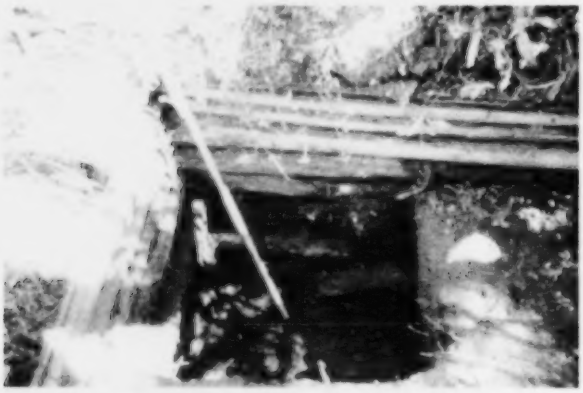
Elevated log cabin style cache

After 1900, another type of cache construction was introduced. The elevated storehouse resembled a small log cabin built on top of posts with a sloped roof and a door.

Collapsed log cabin-style cache.

Other cache types

Pit caches for food storage generally measured about 3 to 4 m by 1.5 m and were about 50 cm deep. The edges were raised up on two or three logs. The pit was lined, usually with hide, and then covered with heavy fresh-cut tree trunks. Pit caches were built on very dry, well-drained soil or into hillsides. Most pit caches are now visible only as circular or square ground depressions.



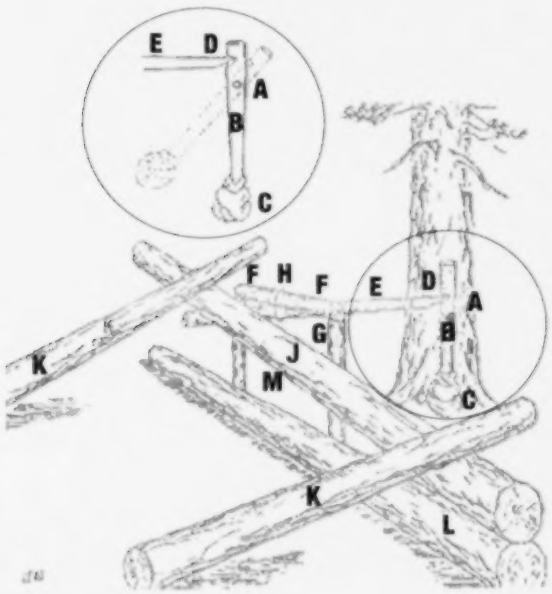
Log-lined cache associated with Hudson's Bay post at Fort Selkirk, ca. 1850.

Caches

Stone meat cache. Meat caches were typically situated on elevated, well drained slopes and made with boulders of sufficient size and weight to discourage disturbance by bears.

Deadfalls

Deadfalls were used for brown bears, marmots, wolverines, wolves, fox, marten, ermines, mink and weasel. The diagram below illustrates the way in which a deadfall would be used to capture a bear. The animal was forced to enter through point M in order to reach the bait (C). Parts K and J of the deadfall were propped up with a trigger (E) which was connected to the bait at point D. As soon as the bait was touched, the trigger would be loosened, thus releasing K and J. K and J were heavy green logs, which would fall onto the animal, breaking its back. Deadfall traps continued to be used long after 1900.

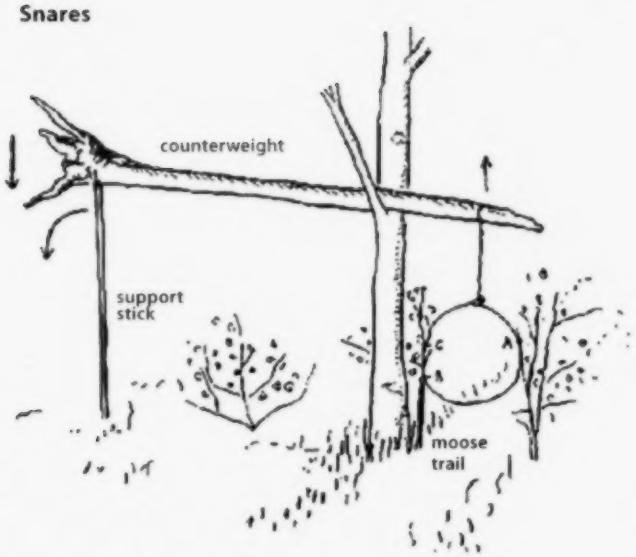


Bear deadfall. (Legros 1981)

Trap: lynx house

Lynx houses were built around leg-hold traps.

Snares



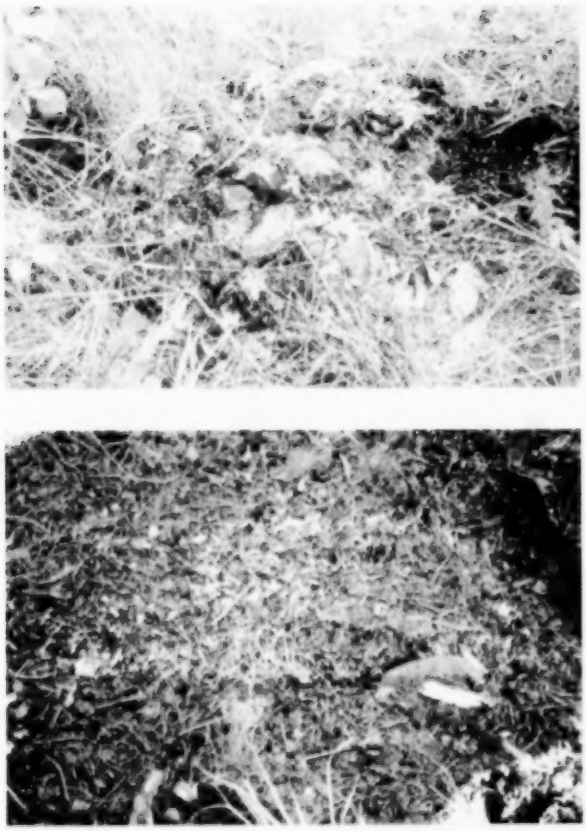
Moose snare set on a trail (Legros 1981)

Bark strips tied high in cottonwoods along a well-used trail. Likely used to anchor part of a snare mechanism.

In pre-contact times, before metal pots and kettles were brought into the country, skin, birchbark and woven spruce root containers were used for cooking. Fist-sized river cobbles were heated in the fire and then, using tongs fashioned out of a bent stick, placed in the water in the container to bring it to a boil. Repeated heatings of the boiling stones eventually cracked them and the remnants of stone boiling from hundreds of years ago can still be seen in burned and fractured river cobbles embedded in the ground surface in old camp fires.

At times, large quantities of burned and calcined (burned white) bone fragments occur in the old fire hearths as well and can still be seen on the ground. To make soup, bone was fragmented and boiled to extract as much of the fat and marrow as possible.

In the old days, sweat baths also made use of heated cobbles onto which water was poured to create steam. Unusual concentrations of burned cobbles may indicate this kind of activity.



Small white-coloured fragments in this hearth are calcined bone fragments

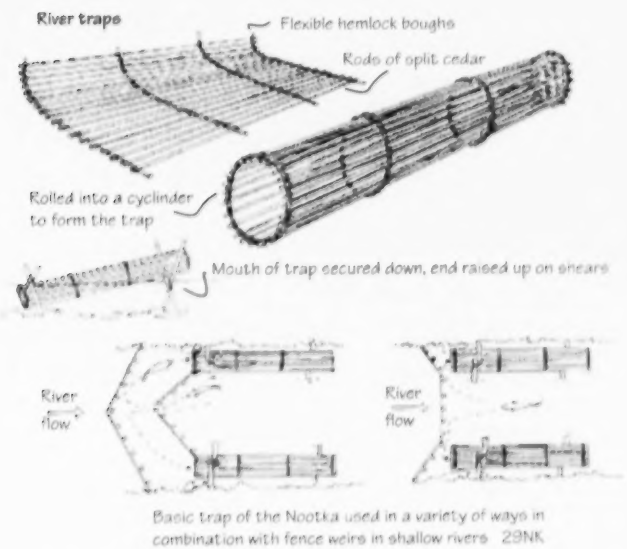
Net fishing sites

The large fish nets that are in common use today at family fish camps were introduced within the past 100 years. Evidence of net fishing can be seen in cached net sinker stones. The principal locations of fish camps are on lakes at outlets and inlets, and at lake narrows.

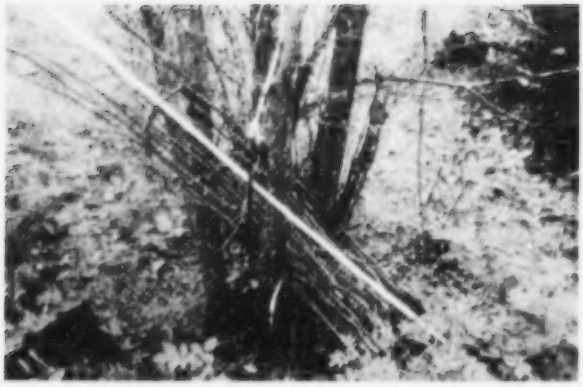
Cached net sinker stores.

Fish traps

In pre-contact times, fish traps were set in shallow channels of rivers and streams where the water flow was reduced. These were ideal locations for the construction of fish weirs and fish traps. The actual camp sites associated with these locations were often a short distance away so that the noise and activities of the camp would not disturb the fish run. Because river and stream channels shift over time, fish camp locations may only have been in use several decades before they needed to be moved.


River traps
Flexible hemlock boughs
Rods of split cedar
Rolled into a cyclinder to form the trap
Mouth of trap secured down, end raised up on shears
River flow
River flow
Basic trap of the Nootka used in a variety of ways in combination with fence weirs in shallow rivers 29NK

Fish traps (from Stewart 1977)



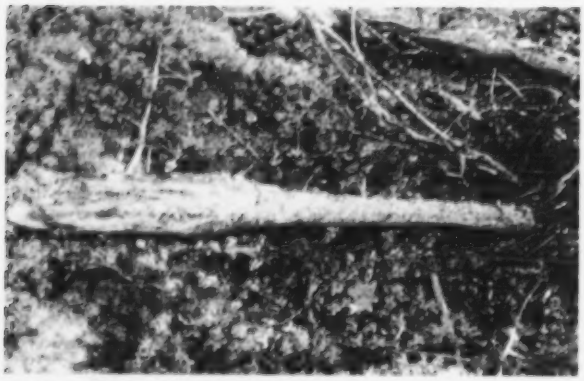
Fish basket cached in the willows

Cache of poles for fish basket construction. Hammerstones were cached nearby as well.

Dug-out canoes, spruce-bark canoes and other watercraft may still be found cached near water bodies and rivers in the Yukon.

Dug-out canoes. The canoe in the bottom picture has been trampled by horses.

Frame of a canvas-covered canoe



Paddle made by shaping a thick sapling.

Stumps cut with a stone adze (or stone axe) exhibit long flutes around the circumference and come to a blunt point. The tree-cutter used the adze to wedge out long splinters of wood from the trunk, working around the tree until it was ready to fall.

Stone adzes were used until steel axes appeared in the mid- to late 19th century. Together with axe-cut stumps, adze-cut stumps are clues to human activity, often indicating a cabin or cache nearby. The height of a stump is also an indicator of season. Stumps that are high are winter cuts.

Caribou fences were constructed in treeline situations. The arms sometimes extended over 2 to 3 km and were constructed of felled trees and brush, using stone adzes, and steel axes in later times.

"On the ground" view of the arm of a caribou fence in northern Yukon.

Bark stripping

In spring when the sap started to run, people used to strip bark to get at the sweet sap. Bark stripping on pine may also indicate harvesting of the cambium or inner bark. Dried and pounded up, this was used in some places as starvation food. The inner bark of spruce was chewed to relieve hunger pangs. Note: It may be difficult to distinguish bark stripping from forest fire scars on trees.

Collecting pitch and sap
Lesions were made in alpine fir to harvest medicinal pitch.

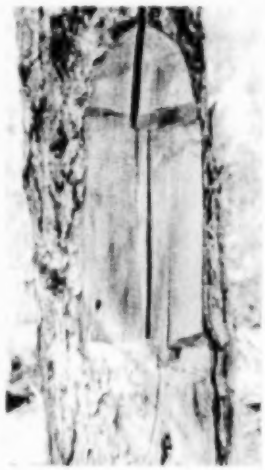
"Burl" formed by a ring of lesions

The network of foot trails that existed in the Yukon in the past linked former camps, villages and resource areas, and led to trading partners in distant territories. Where trails are still visible in the ground, they measure about 30 to 40 cm across and, in places, are worn up to 5 to 10 cm below the surface from the passage of people over hundreds or thousands of years. Many trails are still highly visible entrenched on the side slopes of steep hills.

Here the trail passes by a hunter's temporary brush camp on Nansen Creek.

Blazes on trees are a common trail marker. Before axes were introduced, a young tree might be broken or bent to mark the trail.

Trail marker in the Klukshu Flats area (Cruikshank 1991).



Blaze or marker on tree.

Air-tight stoves were not in common use in the Yukon until the late 19th century. Dwellings constructed by the Hudson's Bay Company traders and early prospectors were heated by stone chimneys.

The presence of a concentration of imported stones is often the only evidence remaining of these early historic buildings.

Bottle middens and other debris are also signs of gold rush and post-gold rush activity.

Gold rush-vintage can midden at Canyon City.

Remains of a gold rush wagon at Canyon City.

Stove fragments associated with a 20th-century winter trapping camp.

Home-made fencing associated with a homesteading cabin in the woods.

Gold rush liquor bottles at a looted bottle dump at the Forty Mile Historic Site.

Second World War military facilities associated with Alaska Highway and Canol and Alcan highway pipeline construction. These sites are part of the Yukon's heritage as well.

A typical location for graves is on a prominent terrace or hill overlooking a lake or river.

Fence grave with personal items.

Corner posts are all that remain of a fence grave burned in a forest fire.

Very old graves are unmarked. Personal items (such as a cup or plate) associated with a ground depression are often indicators of a grave.

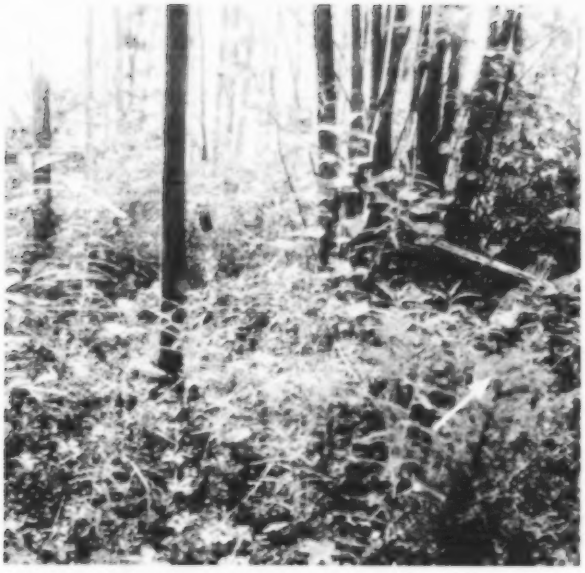
This grave is located on a prominent hill overlooking a lake.

Historic grave fences.

Ground disturbance in a lookout situation or on a high riverbank may indicate a grave. Other indicators may be low mounds or depressions in the ground. Tree throws may have this appearance as well.

Cobbles normally occurring in the till substrate have ended up on the ground surface when the grave was dug.

The collapsed fence surrounding this grave is almost entirely obscured by moss. A stylized cross leaning up against the small spruce is the most visible marker of the grave.



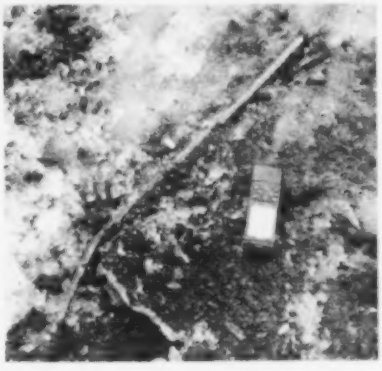
Graves marked with crosses.

Alpine Sites

Perennial snow patches in the alpine can preserve a significant record of past animal and human activity, in some cases dating to the end of the last Ice Age. These sites should be avoided by development activities.

Foreshaft and stone spear point (above); spear shaft with broken stone point (left). These hunting implements date between 3,000 and 4,500 years ago.

Exceptionally well preserved hunting implements recovered from permanent snow patches reveal a record of caribou and sheep exploitation in the alpine which spans thousands of years. Preserved caribou dung is often seen melting from the edges of the snow patches, testifying to thousands of years of caribou use of these sites.



Semi-circular stone hunting blinds are strategically situated to intercept sheep and caribou movement in the alpine. Blinds may occur in clusters or in a line over several kilometres or may be single blinds.

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